

In The Claims

1. (Previously Amended) A mail delivery apparatus for delivery of mail to a user's physical address comprising:

a storage device; and

a processor coupled to the storage device;

the storage device storing a program for controlling the processor; and

the processor operative with the program to

receive an electronic message that includes message attributes including a message recipient and printing criteria,

determine a recipient physical address responsive to the message recipient attribute contained with the electronic message,

compare the message recipient physical address with a plurality of printing locations,

select one of the printing locations based at least in part on the results of said compare and

send the electronic message to the selected printing location.

2. (Previously Amended) The apparatus of claim 1, in which

the processor is further operative with the program to:

query the printing locations having a desired set of attributes responsive to the printing criteria contained with the electronic message, and

receive replies from the printing locations responsive to the query; and

said select of one of the printing locations is further based at least in part on the replies.

3. (Previously Amended) The apparatus of claim 1, further including a database for storing a user record, said record having a counter measuring use of the mail delivery apparatus and operative with a promotional program to effect awarding prizes to the user.

4. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1, the database further including a plurality of advertisements, advertising attributes and recipient demographics, in which the processor is further operative with the program to:

- compare the advertising attributes to the recipient demographics;
- select at least one of the advertisements; and
- attached the selected advertisement(s) to the electronic message.

5. (Previously Amended) A method for converting an electronically generated message to a physical mail object to be delivered to a mail recipient's physical mail address, comprising:

- accessing an intermediate node from a sender's node on a global communication network;

- after accessing the intermediate node, transmitting information to the intermediate node including message, message recipient, and printing criteria;

- locating in a database the physical address information of the mail recipient;

comparing the physical address information of the mail recipient to locations of a plurality of printing stations distributed across the global communications network;

generating a printing instruction to print the message for delivery to the mail recipient at the recipient physical address, for a selected one of the printing stations, responsive to at least the result of said comparing; and

sending the printing instruction to the selected one of the printing stations to perform said printing for said delivery.

6. (Previously Amended) The method of claim 5, wherein the method further comprises querying the plurality of printing stations for printing station information, and storing the information from each of the printing stations at the intermediate node.

7. (Cancelled)

8. (Previously Amended) The method of claim 6, wherein the printing station information includes a printing capability of the printing station.

9. (Previously Amended) The method of claim 6, wherein the printing station information includes a printing capacity of the printing station.

10. (Previously Amended) The method of claim 6, further includes:

accepting bids from a plurality of advertisers having associated advertisements;

selecting one or more advertisements based upon the bids; and

inserting the selected one or more advertisements within the printing instruction.

11. (Previously Amended) A method for using a computer to facilitate communication between a message sender and at least one intended recipient, comprising:

inputting into the computer a message;

inputting into the computer a recipient physical address corresponding to the intended recipient of the message;

outputting the message and the recipient physical address electronically to a mail server;

comparing the recipient physical address with a plurality of distributed printing locations;

distributing the message to a selected one of the plurality of printing locations responsive to at least the result of said comparing; and

printing the message at the selected one of the plurality of locations for delivery to the intended recipient.

12. (Previously Amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the comparing includes calculating a goodness factor based in part upon a proximity of the plurality of distributed printing locations to the recipient physical address.

13. (Previously Amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the method further includes calculating a goodness factor based in part upon a capacity of the plurality of distributed printing locations, and the selecting is further based on the goodness factor.

14. (Previously Amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the method further includes calculating a goodness factor based in part upon a capability of the plurality of distributed printing locations, and the selecting is further based on the goodness factor.

15. (Previously Amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the method further includes calculating a goodness factor based in part upon a price per impression bid by of the plurality of distributed printing locations, and the selecting is further based on the goodness factor.